

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

1. (Currently Amended) A method for packaging a product in a hermetically sealed container having a cup-shaped rigid or semi-rigid body ~~(106)~~ provided with a rim ~~(107)~~ fitted with a closure ~~(124)~~, the method comprising:

[[i]]a) introducing the product into said cup-like shaped body ~~(106)~~;

b) ~~ii) forming proximate to the rim (107) a confined space (204), said space having at least one gas inlet (134) and at least one gas outlet (112), said space (204) being defined between said body (106) and a closure forming, substantially gas impermeable membrane (200), said confined space being formed adjacent to the rim and at a distance therefrom;~~

~~iii) introducing a replacement gas through said inlet (134) into said confined space (204) to replace at least a substantial portion of gas originally contained in the container body (106);~~

~~iv) relative displacement of said body (106) and said closure forming member (200) towards each other to bring the~~

~~closure forming membrane (200) in contact with said rim (107),~~
and

~~v) hermetically attaching the membrane (200) to the rim to~~
~~form a gas tight seal therebetween.~~

b) placing the container into a holder beneath and
concentrically with a central opening of a spacer member;

c) providing above the rim a flat, closure-forming, gas-
impermeable membrane, said membrane extending between the spacer
member and a pressing plate;

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d) relative vertical displacement of the holder and the
spacer member so as to form proximate to the rim a confined
space, said space having at least one gas inlet and at least one
gas outlet, said space being defined by an upper part of the
body, by the closure-forming membrane, by an inwardly facing
surface of the central opening and by a peripheral portion of
the holder, said confined space being formed adjacent to the rim
and at a distance therefrom;

e) introducing a replacement gas through said inlet into
said confined space to replace at least a substantial portion of
gas originally contained in the container body;

f) displacement of said pressing place other to bring the
closure-forming membrane in contact with said rim; and

g) hermetically attaching the membrane to the rim to form a gas-tight seal therebetween.

2. (Original) A method according to Claim 1, wherein said product is a pasty material.

3. (Original) A method according to Claim 1 or 2, wherein said product is a food product.

4. (Currently Amended) A method according to Claim 1, wherein the closure-forming membrane ~~(200)~~ is a plastic film.

5. (Currently Amended) A method according to Claim 1, wherein said confined space ~~(204)~~ is brought in communication with the external atmosphere via the said gas outlet~~-(112)~~.

6. (Currently Amended) A method according to Claim 1, wherein said confined space ~~(204)~~ is brought in communication with a vacuum forming means ~~(604)~~ via the said gas outlet.

7. (Currently Amended) An apparatus for forming a hermetically sealed product-containing container, the container having an essentially cup-like shaped body ~~(106)~~ with rim ~~(107)~~

fitted with a closure—(124); wherein said container is not filled entirely by the product such that a residual space (210) remains between the product and the rim; the apparatus comprising:

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- a holder (104) for holding said container body—(106);
- a spacer member—(130), having a central opening—(132),
- a means for ~~brining~~ bringing the spacer member into sealing engagement against the holder and against a flat closure-forming substantially a gas-impermeable membrane (200) [the arrangement being such that in the state of sealing engagement the inwardly facing wall of said central opening (132), the container body—(106), ~~the holder (104) and the closure-forming membrane (200), define together a confined space (204),~~ said space is adjacent to the rim (107) and at a distance therefrom a peripheral portion of the holder and the closure-forming membrane, define together a confined space, said space is located adjacent to the rim and at a distance therefrom;

- at least one gas inlet (134)—and at least one gas outlet (112) for introducing a replacement gas into said confined space—(204), and replacing at least a substantial portion of gas originally contained in the container body—(106);

- a sealing mechanism comprising a displacing arrangement for displacing one or both of said container body

~~(106)~~—and said closure-forming membrane ~~(200)~~—towards one another and attaching them to one another in a gas-tight fashion.

8. (Currently Amended) An apparatus according to Claim 7, wherein said holder ~~(104)~~—has an opening ~~(108)~~—for receiving the body ~~(106)~~—of the container.

9. (Currently Amended) An apparatus according to Claim 8, wherein the opening ~~(108)~~—of the holder ~~(104)~~—is fitted with an axially projecting skirt (110) for engagement with the rim ~~(107)~~—of the container (106).

10. (Currently Amended) An apparatus according to Claim 7, wherein said gas outlet (112) is formed in the holder ~~(104)~~—and comprises, through going bores.

11. (Currently Amended) An apparatus according to Claim 7, wherein said gas inlet ~~(134)~~—is formed in the spacer member ~~(130)~~—and comprises nozzles for introducing a replacement gas into the confined space ~~(204)~~ a sealed space.

12. (Currently Amended) An apparatus according to Claim 7,

wherein said sealing mechanism is ~~capable to bring said closure-forming membrane (200) into sealing engagement with the rim (107) through the central opening (132) of said spacer member (130)~~ provided with means for bringing said closure-forming membrane into sealing engagement with the rim through the central opening of said spacer member.

13. (Currently Amended) An apparatus according to Claim 7, wherein said closure-forming membrane ~~(200)~~ is a continuous ~~filmmade~~ film, made of a heat-weldable plastic material.

14. (Currently Amended) An apparatus according to Claim 13, comprising a trimming member ~~(180)~~ for trimming edges of the ~~film (200)~~ closure-forming membrane brought into sealing engagement with the rim ~~(107)~~.

15. (Currently Amended) An apparatus according to Claim 10, wherein said gas inlet comprises nozzles ~~(334)~~ made in the spacer member ~~(130)~~ for introducing a replacement gas into the confined space ~~(204)~~ and a bottom surface of said holder ~~(304)~~ is in sealing engagement with a vacuum-forming cup, ~~(604)~~ and wherein said gas outlet is in communication with the vacuum-forming cup.

16. (Currently Amended) An apparatus according to claim 14,
in which said sealing mechanism is provided with a heat sealing
plate ~~(160)~~ wherein the trimming member ~~(180)~~ and the heat
sealing plate are axially displaceable towards the closure-
forming membrane ~~(200)~~ through the central opening ~~(132)~~ in the
spacer member ~~(130)~~.
